2020

Leading Through Change: 2020

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Recommended Citation

The Evolving Role of Department Chair:
Leading the Faculty through Times of Change and Conflict

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Having been department chair for 31 years has caused me to stop and reflect about how the responsibilities and duties of chair have evolved and continue to evolve in our academic world of economic uncertainty and (in many cases) declining student populations.

I have seen the role of chair become increasingly managerial and administrative whereby we are now often intimately involved in strategic planning (departmental, college and university-wide), budget, fundraising, managing conflict, student retention, motivating and encouraging faculty to achieve academic excellence while maintaining scholarship and research, and leading change while maintaining our own standards of excellence in the classroom and in research.

The increasing emphasis on program assessment and outcomes necessary for accreditation and evaluation on many levels has taxed our resource of time management. Performance appraisals with increased emphasis on teacher "accountability" have also tremendously impacted our role.

So how do we juggle it all in order to maintain our status as working, thriving full-time faculty while increasing our duties and responsibilities as administrators and/or managers?

My plan for the session is to summarize previously collected data from chairs of departments of various sizes and types in order to discuss and understand better our ever changing role as we see responsibilities of delegating, leading change, creative budgeting and fundraising, grant writing and managing conflict become vital to our positions.

I would then coordinate and bring the results to the presentation for discussion. In addition to this I will construct various scenarios of conflict within the role of chairs (such as faculty vs. administrator, academic excellence vs. student retention, leading change vs. managing conflict) and use the audience to brainstorm possible solutions to these conflicts. There will be a great emphasis on the use of time-management skills, delegating responsibilities to other faculty, and developing partnerships with the outside world for internships and future employment of our graduates.

My hope is that department chairs of all genre (new, intermediate or experienced) will come away with ideas as to how to better manage it all while maintaining our love for academia and our disciplines.